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(54) Title: VIRTUAL POSTAGE METERING SYSTEM**(57) Abstract**

A virtual postage metering system (10) and method provides value added services corresponding to postage metering transactions. Funds are not stored at the user's site reducing the risk of unauthorized modification of account balances. There is a database record (60) of every mail piece, which means that verification will be improved since all valid mail pieces are known. Furthermore, the present invention enables the postal service to know the volume of mail to be processed prior to receipt of the physical mail pieces. Since more mailer data is available (e.g. when users usually mail, how much mail per day, average postage amount) the virtual postage metering system (10) enables the postal service to predict mail handling patterns. Finally, users have the option to pay as they go (130) which contrasts present systems in which funds must be on deposit prior to being downloaded to a meter although such downloaded funds may remain in the meter for weeks before being used.

